CHAPTER IV

WE were awakened shortly after dawn by the roaring of the surf and, after a wash down with ice-cold well water in the courtyard, I strolled through the village to get a glimpse of the mountains. Pink in the first flush of morning light, Jebel Kawa, the highest peak in the range, rose in fluted folds from a turquoise sea. A brisk westerly wind blew across the desert, and the palm fronds nodded violently, like feathers in the bonnets of agitated old ladies. Streaks of butterfly blue glinted between the leaves—the bright underwings of the jays. Behind the low plaster wall of a merchant's summer house the plum trees were sprouting into baby green, and tortoise-shell butterflies hovered lazily in the increasing radiance of sunlight.

On my return to the Khan Sahib's house I found Sparkes smoking a cigarette in the courtyard. Ali had sent a car with a towrope and had brought him back at midnight, but the ropes had broken several times and we were abed before he reached the village. Sparkes showed me a grey lizard he had brought back, a fine specimen measuring four feet from nose to tail, which he gave to one of the servants to cook for their dinner. Breakfast was a simple meal of fruit, coffee and dates rolled in chipatties; being ravenous we did it justice. The Arabs are sparing eaters, and only consume large quantities of food at their ceremonial feasts or when entertaining guests, and we found that when in the desert it was easy to accustom oneself to their habits.

After a pipe and a stroll along the foreshore, we were joined by the Khan Sahib, resplendent in a gold-brocaded turban and brown silk *abbas*, and he suggested that we should make a call on Sheikh Sultan bin Salim, ruler of Ras-al-Khaimah The Khan Sahib, who is a handsome man of sixty-five, six feet tall, broad-shouldered and inclined to stoutness, has the fair skin of the Persian or Bedouin, expressive hands, and the gracious manners of an aristocrat. With his bushy black eyebrows and grey toothbrush moustache, he could easily be mistaken for an Italian nobleman. He belongs to a very ancient Arab family, and his father was British Resident at Sharjah at the beginning of the century.